

## SPOTLIGHT: OSS/PROVISIONING

# Cablevision Rides Netsurfer Wave

By MATT STUMP

Cablevision Systems Corp. has tapped Netsurfer Inc. to handle online provisioning and account-management activities for its Optimum Online cable-modem service.

The Netsurfer software allows prospective Optimum Online subscribers to set up service on their own, via the Web, so a field technician doesn't need to visit a customer's home after they purchase a cable modem.

The software also improves productivity at the help desk, because subscribers can use online self-diagnostic tools to troubleshoot problems. Netsurfer also said the software can reduce subscriber-maintenance costs through automatic downloads and updates.

Netsurfer CEO Stephen Walden said Cablevision is moving from an in-house provisioning system to a multimodule product suite.

Those modules include the NetQualifier software package, which helps customers provision modem service. Net Qualifier inspects the homeowner's PC to determine if has enough random access memory (RAM) and other system resources to support a cable modem. The software can be used whether a subscriber has purchased a cable modem, or if they're just testing their PC to see if it qualifies, Walden said.

Once a subscriber orders data service, Netsurfer's Expert Provisioner can install any software the MSO wants to include, including browsers, electronic-mail clients, drivers or third-party applications like antivirus software, Walden said.

"We'll do the install and configure

it so everything is user-ready," he said. "It's transparent to the end user."

That software also makes sure the new high-speed account is synched up with existing MSO billing information.

### NETGUIDE EXTRA

The NetSurfer suite also includes a portal-page software package, which Cablevision has renamed NetGuide. The NetGuide frame pops up when a user signs on, displaying the MSO's URL — and providing links and branding opportunities for Optimum.

"From there they can go into their Web browser," Walden said. "It gives operators the flexibility to offer different URLs for different subscribers."

Netsurfer's Softcast Direct module allows a user's PC to talk directly to the MSO's server. That allows an operator to download software updates or new configuration settings without the end user ever knowing that a download took place, he said.

The company's Softcast Monitor canvasses modem subscribers, monitoring download speeds and other statistics that can be aggregated for the MSO.

Optimum subscribers also can use a set of self-repair tools.

"It does self-repair for connectivity issues or PC level problems," Walden said. "We'll detect problems and repair them or tell end the user how to repair them."

If the problem still requires a call to the MSO, at least a fair amount of troubleshooting has already been



Netsurfer's Softcast Direct model helped Cablevision craft a portal for Optimum Online users (pictured).

done, Walden said.

Netsurfer, whose clients also include Knology Inc., Americatel, NTT Data and McLeod USA, said customers report a 95-percent success rate on self-installation.

Those users also report a 75 percent decrease in account-provisioning time and a 68 percent reduction in operational problems that get brought to the help desk, Walden said.

"Calls that come in are shorter as well," Walden said, which adds up to a reduction in churn.

Val Green, vice president of product strategy for Optimum Online, said her technical-support group "has been raving" about the product. "It cuts down an enormous amount of phone calls.

Said Walden, who was a senior executive at online pioneer Prodigy. "Provisioning is a major problem and we set out to solve that as a problem," he said. ■